

FRAMING HAN-UYGHUR RELATIONS ON YOUTUBE

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the most salient issues surrounding the tensions between the Ethnic Han and Uyghur in the People's Republic of China from the perspective of the nonestablishment. Using YouTube.com as a source, this study analyzes the videos uploaded to that website as well as the commentary associated with the videos, both posted by everyday netizens. This study concludes that many of the issues traditional sources have found to be relevant are also prevalent on YouTube.com. Additionally, this study suggests that there is dissatisfaction among the Han on the way the Chinese government handles its ethnic policy, especially as it relates to the Uyghur.

This study also addresses some of the methodological problems associated with using the Internet as a source and YouTube in particular. This study suggests that while attribution can be difficult, if not impossible to ascertain, this peculiarity of the Internet also allows for more open and honest discussion of difficult ethnic issues denied traditional sources. It was also concluded that YouTube has the potential to help refine and guide the utilization of traditional sources. This study hopes to have established that meaningful original research can be conducted on the Internet and on YouTube.com.

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INTRODUCTION

Urumqi, Xinjiang, Summer 2009

A mandarin speaking man and woman hastily produce a video recorder and point it down towards the street several stories below their apartment window. The video image is choppy, bouncy, and blurry as the man struggles to get the zoom correct. The woman urges the man to hurry as he attempts to get a clear shot of what is occurring directly in front of their apartment complex. The woman gasps and squeals as she reacts to violence on which the camera has not yet focused.

Finally, the man has captured the scene. There are dozens of people in the street and there is an orange bus parked askew directly in front of the complex. Sprawled next to the bus, partially on the sidewalk, partially on the street, are two men. One attempts to rise and struggles to his knees. The woman cries “He can’t move!” A long metal pipe comes from outside the camera’s view and connects with the back of the man’s neck. The pipe connects again and the man collapses.

The camera is jostled and the image is lost but is regained in time to capture what appears to be a woman in a burke wielding a metal pipe repeatedly striking the man’s head. Moments later the man is found to be sitting as he watches the woman pass the pipe to an individual who, already having his own, passes the pipe to a second man. The mandarin speaking woman several stories up is crying, fear shaking her voice. “Were not going out,” she sobs. A child cries in the background. The camera pans to the two men

lying in the street. One shifts his leg, the other lies still. The camera goes blurry and the video ends.

This video was entitled “New Xinjiang uygur criminal evidence - civilian recorded 75riot violence 2.flv” and can be found on YouTube along with other videos depicting episodes of violence that occurred between Han and Uyghurs in Urumqi, the capital of China’s northwest province of Xinjiang, during the summer of 2009.¹ Two thousand miles away in Guangdong Province, a rumor circulated that several Uyghur men had raped two women at the Xuri Toy Factory in Shaoguan, Guangdong Province. One of the women later denied the rumor. In response to the rumor, on June 25, a group of Han workers entered a dormitory where Uyghur migrant workers lived and began to beat them indiscriminately with iron bars, knives and other crude weapons. Ten days later, hundreds of Uyghurs took to the streets of Urumqi to protest the government’s handling of the episode. Initially the protests were peaceful, but eventually they turned violent.

Riot police were mobilized and on July 6, Beijing shut down Internet and cell phone service in Urumqi. On the following day, groups of Han roved through the streets of Urumqi committing revenge killings. International media reporting indicated that the vigilantes did not trust the government to protect Han residents. By July 11, the police forces had brought the violence under control.² Casualty estimates, and the breakdown of casualties along ethnic lines, differ widely depending on the source of the information. One thing appears to be clear; the violence ran along specific ethnic lines, Han-Uyghur.

¹ “New Xinjiang uygur criminal evidence - civilian recorded 75riot violence 2.flv,” YouTube, Last accessed December 2, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9r_yPGkUT0.2, 2010.

² Gardner Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2010), 168-169.

The above video's title "New Xinjiang uygur criminal evidence - civilian recorded 75riot violence 2.flv" requires some decryption. "75riot violence" refers to violence occurring on July 5, 2009. "Civilian" refers to the source of the footage; the individual that uploaded this video on YouTube appears to be emphasizing that the video footage was acquired by a nongovernmental source. What the YouTube poster probably meant to imply by using the term "civilian" was "authentic" or "reliable" or "trustworthy." He most likely wants the audience to believe that footage generated by a governmental source might distort the facts to support a political agenda, while this footage was caught and posted by an individual that purportedly had no agenda. "Uygur criminal evidence" is another loaded segment of the title. This was not portrayed as a violent act of self defense nor as violence rooted in significant and longstanding social grievances. No, this was a "criminal" act performed by "Uygurs."

The reality of what happened on the other side of the video is not as important as how it was packaged and interpreted. Most of those who followed the violence of the summer of 2009 experienced a mediated version of the events. News agencies, government spokespersons, and activists have woven images, sounds, and words into montages, endowed with meanings specific to their respective objectives. The "facts" of the events recorded in the above video are that a few individuals beat two men with metal pipes. How those facts were couched, and into what narrative they are inserted, have a greater effect than the facts themselves.

The above video could have had many titles. The title could have been: "Uyghur Anger at Chinese Governmental Oppression Boils Over; Ethnic Han Caught in Crossfire." Another could have been: "Han Discrimination of Uyghur Turns Full Circle!" A third

might have been: “Xinjiang Security Forces Unable or Unwilling to Stem Ethnic Violence.” Any number of titles could have been created for the same video. This footage could be used to support or refute any number of narratives, but the video poster chose to focus on one of many variables that complicate Han-Uyghur relations. This poster chose to focus on Uyghur “criminality.”

Furthermore, the video could have been altered in different ways. The complete removal of audio, for example, would have changed the entire *feel* of the video. For example, the absence of the audio which would remove the woman’s emotional responses might make the video more detached. The visual sequences could also have been spliced differently in a way that would leave the viewer believing the men survived the attack. The portion where the individual in the burke beat the man could have been removed itself which would have muddled the attribution of the violence to a Muslim. It is also possible that those two “victims” had just finished killing a Uyghur, only to be discovered and killed in an act of revenge, but that this portion of the footage was deliberately not filmed, or spliced out of the final video product.

Instead, the audio, the visual sequences, and the title gave the video specific meanings, intended or not. The meanings of this incident have been framed in ways that declare that Uyghurs are criminals. Whether the video poster intended to frame the events in this manner or whether the frame was merely a reflection of the video poster’s bias, from the perspective of the viewer it is the same. The viewer is exposed to a frame that portrays the Uyghur as a people that kill the innocent and fill ordinary Han neighbors with horror and fear.

Many have a stake in how Han-Uyghur relations are portrayed, not the least of which the Chinese government or Rebiya Kadeer along with proponents for a Uyghur-led free Xinjiang or those advocating improved treatment of the Uyghur in China. Except for those on the ground in Urumqi, all others experience Han-Uyghur strife through the framing of others, who have their own agendas or biases. Interested parties use print, video, radio, and internet media to frame these problems in specific ways at times appealing more to the emotional understanding of the issues than the intellectual understanding of the same.

This study seeks to view the framing of Han-Uyghur relations and strife from the perspective of the nonestablishment as evidenced on the Internet, specifically YouTube. How do Chinese and English language using netizens³ understand the problems that surround the troubled Han-Uyghur relations and how do they present them in this unique medium? Which issues dominate the narratives associated with Han-Uyghur relations on YouTube and do they corroborate what scholars have discovered using traditional research methods?

YouTube as a Source

Why choose YouTube as a source of data? YouTube is a rather singular type of media. It is a website where nearly any type of video can be uploaded. News clips, non-professional homemade videos, violent footage caught by witnesses, or video clips of various entertainment programs to mention just a few. There are many other types of videos on YouTube but the aforementioned capture the main types of videos being

³ A netizen is a person who regularly uses the Internet.

uploaded that are intentionally or unintentionally forming a debate on why Han-Uyghur relations are so poor.

YouTube videos are “living” documents. These videos are being repeatedly accessed with many receiving new comment posts on a regular basis. When possible, the author checked back with the videos he reviewed several weeks after re-accessing each video. Many of the videos had up to a hundred new instances of access in a two week period, even though in some cases, the video has been uploaded two years prior. It was found that, on average, the videos with the most instances of accessing had received new *comments* within the last four to five weeks, some within one to seven days.⁴ These videos do not collect dust even after years of shelf life.

The relevance of these videos is reaffirmed with each new accessing or comment post. They are not going away like yesterday’s news and continue to have the possibility to influence new viewers with each passing day. Additionally, the numbers of accesses can be much lower than the actual number of people that have seen a video. A video with 22,000 instances of access, as some of the analyzed videos had, may have been seen by several people per instance of access as coworkers or family members gather around an office or den computer. Finally, videos can be seen by one individual and then blogged about in other online and offline venues, making it impossible to define the limits of the influence of a single video to the access rate or number of comment postings alone.

⁴ The author uses the term “access” as opposed to the YouTube term “viewing” deliberately. YouTube uses the term “view” to indicate the number of times any computer accesses a particular video. The accessing count, however, cannot indicate the actual number of individuals that view the video or the number of times they do so per access. Once a computer accesses a video, the video can be played and replayed to any size of audience per viewing per instance of access. It is for this reason that the author will use “access” instead of the YouTube term “view.”

Getting at these issues surrounding Han-Uyghur relations, at least from the standpoint of those that represent the races themselves, can be difficult. Regimes that have been traditionally restrictive on the freedom of expression can complicate the reliability of surveys. In his assessment of a national survey conducted in 1993 in the PRC, Matthew Hoddie concluded that ethnic minority respondents were uncooperative and less forthcoming than were ethnic majority respondents, something that contrasts sharply with the minority experience in the U.S. Hoddie maintains that PRC hostility towards minority activists has conditioned minorities to limit attention to their political views.⁵ There is also a case to be made that the Chinese government attitudes towards pointed criticism of the regime has blunted the level of openness and honesty from ethnic majority respondents participating in the same surveys.

A brief comparison between the source material that can be found on YouTube and what can be found on the Chinese variants Tudou.com and 56.com is instructive. The author preformed a cursory search using the same term used for this study of YouTube in both Chinese sites. The types of videos posted and the commentary associated with them on both Tudou.com and 56.com differed greatly with those on YouTube. As has been mentioned, videos on YouTube ranged from entertainment pieces, news from a variety of sources, homemade videos, as well as footage of Han-Uyghur violence in China. 56.com and Tudou.com had no such content. The videos posted were almost exclusively entertainment. There was practically no commentary whatsoever even though the commentary functions were enabled. What commentary there was related only to the quality of the performance and had nothing to do with Han-Uyghur

⁵ Matthew Hoddie, "Ethnic Difference and Survey Cooperation in the People's Republic of China," *Asian Survey*, 48, no.2 (2008): 303–322.

relations or Chinese politics, which was prolific on the YouTube videos. YouTube seems to represent a safe place to air and discuss these sensitive issues. It is a place where Uyghur internet users, their supporters, as well as members of the Chinese YouTube user population can come and frame these issues in ways unthinkable on the Chinese sites.

Furthermore, YouTube is not an organized media source like CNN or the People's Daily that edits all of its content to ensure it stays on a consistent message. YouTube is a place where anyone can post nearly anything in any way they want. It is almost as if YouTube is a place where ethnic minority and ethnic majority "survey respondents" can come and answer questions that they pose to themselves unencumbered by the problems that Hoddie has concluded exists in the PRC.

It would be impossible to identify exactly what demographic of Chinese Internet users frequent YouTube, but some attempt at a generalization will be made. Speaking directly to the question of the availability of these videos to the Chinese, they are largely not accessible inside of China. While it is possible to circumvent China's Great Fire Wall, it is difficult for the general public. Therefore, speaking of individuals of Chinese descent, YouTube videos are accessible mainly to those that are living abroad.

Quantcast, a web analytics service, estimates that 36% of U.S. YouTube users are between the ages of 18 and 34.⁶ The same source estimates that 56% of U.S. YouTube users make over \$60K a year; 50% of U.S. users have graduated college (to say nothing of high school education). U.S. YouTube users, therefore, are young, educated and affluent. Additionally, YouTube has a much higher concentration of Asian users than Caucasian users as compared to the Internet average as a whole.⁷ These statistics seem to

⁶ "YouTube.com," Quantcast, Dec. 2010, <http://www.quantcast.com/youtube.com>.

⁷ "YouTube.com."

mirror the demographics of Internet users in China. According to China's "China Internet Network Information Center" (CINIC) 2007 report, over 65% of internet users in China are between the ages of 18 and 35. Nearly 58% are single, over 80% have finished high school with nearly 52% possessing some college degree. Nearly 33% are students and nearly another third are employees of an enterprise or business.⁸ China has a significant population living abroad, 35 million according to the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.⁹ For the purposes of this study, it will be assumed that the Chinese YouTube users are young, educated, and upwardly mobile Chinese living abroad. Statistics suggest that the video posters share the same demographic category, but this cannot be concluded with a strong degree of certainty.

On the other hand, access to the Internet and to YouTube in particular among the Uyghur is very limited. Of the estimated 9 million Uyghurs worldwide, around 8.4 million live in China, mostly in Xinjiang. From within China, their access to the Internet is poor simply because Xinjiang has a relatively low number of Internet users as compared to China as a whole. According to CINIC's report, only 7.7% of Xinjiang's population are Internet users; the number of websites that Xinjiang hosts is 0.3% of the total number located in China.¹⁰ There are other measurements, but the bottom line is that Xinjiang's internet infrastructure and the level of internet saturation is quite low. Furthermore, the Uyghur living there are poor and would have proportionally less access to limited internet resources than their Han counterparts. The remaining 600,000

⁸ "Statistical Survey Report on The Internet Development in China," China Internet Network Information Center, 2007, <http://www.cnnic.net.cn/download/2007/cnnic19threport.pdf>.

⁹ "CASS report: number of overseas Chinese up to 35 mln," Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the United States of America, Accessed March 9, 2011, <http://www.china-embassy.org/eng/qwgz/t297510.htm>.

¹⁰ "Statistical Survey Report on The Internet Development in China."

Uyghurs live mostly in the Central Asian States (CAR) where, as of 2005, only 3-9% of the population used the Internet at least once per week depending on the country in question.¹¹

In short, there are very few Uyghur Internet users and even fewer Uyghur YouTube users. Comments and video postings that tend to support Uyghur causes found in YouTube can reasonably be attributed to an extremely small population of Uyghurs living in areas such as Europe and the U.S. along with their supporters. These, like the Chinese YouTube users, are young.¹²

Finally, the YouTube video posters and those who add to the commentary appear to be the nonelite. Their misunderstandings of history, English spelling or misuse of Chinese characters, and their unprofessional use of expletives and grammar mistakes show that the commentators are on the whole ordinary people and not professional activists.

Han-Uyghur Contemporary Issues

What are the issues that drive Han-Uyghur ethnic tension and violence? Scholars have attributed these problems in part to Uyghur resistance to integrate into China's national identity. Uyghur difficulty in successfully integrating into China's economy in part stems from their refusal to call themselves Chinese, and in part to the Han's refusal to allow them to equally participate in the employment opportunities of China. Furthermore, the belief held by the Uyghur that their culture and religion are under attack

¹¹ "Internet Development in Central Asia and its Role as an Information Resource," Organization For Security and Cooperation in Europe, Last accessed February 13, 2011, <http://www.osce.org/form/15678>.

¹² Attribution will only be attempted within these parameters and will be general in nature. No attempt will be made to attribute a single video posting or a single comment to a specific demographic. Rather, the general trends in postings and commentary content will be cautiously attributed to the above mentioned Chinese and Uyghur demographics.

by the Chinese government is also unhelpful. Scholars have highlighted Uyghur aspirations for more political autonomy, which range from a greater degree of self determination in a Chinese controlled Xinjiang to full-blown independence. Finally, scholars point to racist-motivated views held by both the Uyghur and the Han, and the Chinese government's insertion of violent Uyghur resistance into a narrative of terrorism.

Dru Gladney has focused on the impact the state has had on the formation of the Uyghur identity in the first place. He has argued that the Uyghur identity is the result of a dialectical interaction between the Uyghur and the Chinese state, building upon an agreed on ethnonym-“Uyghur.”¹³ The Chinese state assigned this group of Turks living in Xinjiang the label of “Uyghur,” a label that had been out of use for 500 years, and which the Uyghur have subsequently adopted and used as a building block to strengthening a collective ethnic and national identity.

As other scholars have concluded, many Uyghurs refuse to identify themselves as Chinese nationals, which resistance takes many shapes. Gardner Bovingdon has demonstrated that the Uyghur engage in representational politics and various forms of everyday resistance to defy their inclusion in the Chinese multiethnic state. These measures include forming their own versions of Xinjiang and Uyghur history; colloquial language, often abusive, that alienates the Uyghur from the Han; and popular art forms such as poetry, jokes and songs, and other literary works. All of these activities, Bovingdon argues, strengthen the collective Uyghur identity as well as their determination to remain separate from the Chinese “nation.”¹⁴

¹³ Dru C. Gladney, *Dislocating China: Muslims, Minorities, and Other Subaltern Subjects* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 228.

¹⁴ Bovingdon, *The Uyghurs*, chapters 2 and 3.

The Uyghur language is intimately connected with the Uyghur national identity and its resistance to be included in China's national identity. As Blaine Kaltman has discovered through a series of interviews conducted in China, Uyghurs with a good command of Mandarin (and a correspondingly poorer command of Uyghur) are looked down on by fellow Uyghurs. They are either considered "sell outs" or are not real Uyghurs, at times derogatorily referred to as "Chinese Uyghurs."¹⁵

Rebecca Clothey produced similar findings while conducting a series of interviews with minority students at the Central University for Nationalities (CUN) in Beijing, China. Clothey determined that minority students who entered the university by testing in their native tongue felt that those other minority students who entered by testing using the Chinese language were not "real" minorities. Clothey cites the phrase "fourteenth minority" which is used by Uyghurs to describe those Uyghurs that had strong Chinese language skills, a people that were not quite Uyghur or Chinese. Clothey discovered that to a great extent, the minority students that tested in Chinese envied the native tongue language skills of those that tested in their native language and even felt looked down upon by those that had strong native language skills.¹⁶

Wenfang Tang and Gaochao found evidence that supported this link between language and ethnic identity in surveys they conducted in Chinese high schools during 2006-2007. They found that the Uyghur had a strong desire to learn the Uyghur language but a much lower desire to learn Chinese. They further discovered that it was important

¹⁵ Blaine Kaltman, *Under the Heel of the Dragon: Islam, Racism, Crime, and the Uighur in China* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2007), Chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁶ Rebecca Clothey, "China's Policies for Minority Nationalities in Higher Education: Negotiating National Values and Ethnic Identities," *Comparative Education Review*, 49, no. 3 (2005): 389-409.

for the Uyghur students to learn their language in order to preserve their cultural traditions.¹⁷

While poor Mandarin language skills strengthen a sense of Uyghur solidarity, they damage their chances to find well-paying employment, as Kaltman has argued. At least from the perspective of labor efficiency, Han employers would rather hire a Han with strong mandarin skills than a Uyghur with whom he can barely communicate. Language, at least, is a barrier to upward mobility for the Uyghur, but their economic problems may run deeper, however. The Uyghurs Kaltman interviewed felt discriminated against by the Han in that they believed that even with a good work ethic and the educational opportunities afforded them by the state, the Uyghur would still not have an equal chance at advancement in society. Clothely reports similar sentiments in her interviews with Uyghur students who entered the university by testing in their native tongue. These students reported being mistaken for foreigners off campus and felt that as Uyghurs, they were looked down on, particularly by the Han.

In addition to economic disenfranchisement, the Uyghur feel politically marginalized as well. The “autonomy” afforded them in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) has not turned out to be very autonomous with the CCP maintaining tight control over politics in Xinjiang. Additionally, the CCP has deliberately diluted Uyghur influence in decision making by appointing smaller minority groups proportionally more offices than are warranted by their ratio in the population. Through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Beijing has successfully denied

¹⁷ Wenfang Tang and Gaochao He, "Separate but Loyal: Ethnicity and Nationalism in China," *East-West Center, Policy Study* 56 (2010): 1-50.

the Uyghur a government in exile, and has created a hostile environment in the CARs for runaway dissidents.

The Uyghur also face severe oppression from the police and judicial system. Crackdowns like “Strike Hard” have hit Uyghur communities hard. Gladney has noted that even the judicial system seems set against the Uyghur because it has punished Uyghurs far more harshly than the Hui (another Muslim group in China) for involvement in protests against a book that detailed Muslim sexual customs.¹⁸ Justin Rudelson and William Jankowiak, however, have maintained that these harsh measures are part of a cohesive plan that utilizes both hard and soft policies in order to assimilate the Uyghur into the larger Chinese economy and political culture. This is accomplished by punishing those that oppose the state and incentivizing the rest of the Uyghur population to integrate. Rudelson and Jankowiak emphasized that Han migration into Xinjiang is an essential part of these goals.¹⁹

According to Rudelson and Jankowiak, Beijing implements soft policies that have allowed hundreds of communist cadre who are ethnic Uyghur to go on Hajj, encouraged mosque construction, and supported the historical works of Uyghurs, as well as their inclusion in minority affirmative action policies. At the same time, Beijing has employed hard policies designed to punish and discourage active dissidence from the state. These have included police crackdowns on disaffected Uyghurs such as “Strike Hard, Maximum Pressure,” closing mosques, and clampdowns on historical literature that are

¹⁸ Gladney, *Dislocating China*, 232.

¹⁹ Justin Rudelson and William Jankowiak, “Acculturation and Resistance: Xinjiang Identities in Flux,” in *Xinjiang: China’s Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr, (Armonk and London: ME Sharpe, 2004, 299-319).

too nationalistic. Politically speaking, the Uyghur live in a capricious environment where yesterday's policy is today's taboo.

Though they are at times allowed some religious freedoms, they are as often as not denied them, which creates the impression that the state is actively attempting to destroy Uyghur religion and as a result, their culture. As James Millward has pointed out, Chinese state restrictions on Muslim practice of religion have been implemented in a variety of ways from the Qing Dynasty down to the present.²⁰ Frederick Starr assesses that many Uyghur have embraced Islam specifically because it sets them apart from their Chinese rulers.²¹

Rudelson and Jankowiak, however, have argued along a different line of thinking with respect to the subject of cultural annihilation. They submit that in the last fifty years, the primary allegiance of Uyghurs has been to family, clan and locality, and not to the collective ethnic whole, and that the current Uyghur sense of collective identity is not as strong as some scholars assume. Essentially, they argue that a strong *sense* of collective culture does not exist among the Uyghur.

However, they also maintain that of all the minorities, the Uyghur have the least to fear with respect to cultural assimilation. They agree with Kaltman's findings that the Uyghur do not marry outside their ethnic background, making them a more insular ethnic group. Furthermore, they argue that the home, mosque, and to a certain extent, eating establishments are ethnic borderlands wherein the Uyghur, Han, and Hui do not mix. It is

²⁰ James Millward, *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

²¹ S. Frederick Starr, "Introduction," in *Xinjiang: China's Muslim Borderland*, ed. S. Frederick Starr (Armonk and London: ME Sharpe, 2004), 3-26.

for these reasons that they conclude that the Uyghur are the most culturally impenetrable of all minorities albeit with a somewhat fractured sense of self.

In contrast to this scholarship, Tang and He found that the Uyghur students they surveyed felt a high degree of affinity towards their Chinese national identity, more so than their fellow Han students. The Uyghur students' national identity score was 90 (out of 100), whereas the Han national identity score was 89. The Uyghur had a much higher ethnic identity score of 96 as compared to the Han ethnic identity score of 80. Tang and He compared the strength of national identity among ethnic minorities in both Russia and the U.S., finding that these minorities had much weaker affinity with their national identity than did Chinese minorities. Tang and He conclude that there is a strong sense of loyalty to the Chinese state by minorities, including the Uyghur, but also a strong desire to be culturally separate from the majority.

Despite Tang and He's findings, frustrated political aspirations of the Uyghur remain a problem area between them and the Han. Gladney emphasized that by establishing an autonomous region in Xinjiang but denying the Uyghur true autonomy, the Chinese state has thus unwittingly provided itself as a counterpoint to Uyghur nationalistic aspirations while defining a basis for those aspirations. Furthermore, by defining the geographic boundaries of the Uyghur autonomous zone, China has unwittingly drawn the geographic boundaries for the Eastern Turkistan Republic many Uyghurs want to establish. Recalling Gladney's argument that the Uyghur are to some degree indebted to the Chinese state for their collective identity, it is ironic to see that it has also provided the same with the contours of their political aspirations as well. Though not all proponents of the Uyghur advocate complete independence from the

Chinese state, calling for more modest measures that would promote truer autonomy, many want to establish an independent Uyghur-led state.

These political goals are fueled to some degree by a sense of separateness from the Han majority, which is derived from racist attitudes held by both Han and Uyghur alike. According to the Kaltman's interviews, the Uyghur see the Han as morally bankrupt. Urumqi is seen as less safe now that it is more highly populated with Han immigrants who are perceived to be selling drugs, harboring desires to rob the Uyghur, and fueling an increase in prostitution. Kaltman found that most Urumqi Uyghur residents believed that crime was a problem in their city, but they did not feel any concern that they would be the victim of a crime at the hands of another Uyghur. Conversely, Kaltman found that the Han viewed the Uyghur as a "fierce," "unreasonable" people with a "primitive mentality" who are "apathetic to development." He found that the Han hold a common belief that the Uyghur are thieves and criminals.

Finally, terrorism is another problem that is complicating Han-Uyghur relations. Bovingdon has demonstrated that the Chinese government has deliberately inserted Uyghur resistance into the narrative of terrorism. Just five months after 9-11, the government came out with a report entitled "Eastern Turkistan Terrorist Forces Cannot Escape Without Impunity." Bovingdon essentially argued that this and other reports repackaged years of protest activity as the deliberate acts of Uyghur terrorist organizations linked to Osama bin Laden.

Bovingdon maintained that this particular representation is out of sync with the record. Bovingdon shows that since 1998, the numbers of protest events in Xinjiang have sharply declined while the numbers of protest events in the rest of China have sharply

increased.²² Bovingdon argues that the violent nature of Uyghur activists has been exaggerated, especially in comparison with the rest of Chinese protesters. Rudelson and Jankowiak have also touched on terrorism, arguing that the PRC has linked its anti-terrorism campaign in Xinjiang with the U.S. War on Terror.

This scholarship has covered a lot of ground. These scholars have interviewed Uyghurs attending state-run colleges, surveyed Han and Uyghur high school students, and interviewed hundreds of Han and Uyghur adults from several locations in China. They have also canvassed the historical record, Chinese government publications, as well as the contemporary writings of the Uyghur in order to understand Han-Uyghur relations.

This study of YouTube videos and their corresponding commentary has found that many of the issues identified in current scholarship are prevalent on the Internet as well. There is an abundance of evidence that racist attitudes, contests of national identity, the status of Xinjiang, and a narrative of terrorism are problems that plague Han-Uyghur relations. What did not appear *strongly* in the videos and commentary was a narrative detailing the oppression of the Uyghur by the Chinese state to include political, religious, cultural, and economic oppression. This was most likely due to the search terms used to collect the evidence and not because these are not important issues themselves. One strong trend in the source material that does not appear in previous scholarship is the tendency for Chinese language users to blame the Chinese government for the violence in Urumqi.

If there is a weakness in this scholarship it is that the prosecution of the source material has been largely determined by the scholars and less by the source material itself. That there are issues evidenced on YouTube that are not in the current scholarship

²² Bovingdon's study encompassed 1993 to 2005, and thus does not include the 2009 violence.

such as Chinese users blaming the Chinese government highlight this weakness. Using YouTube and the Internet as a source allows the individuals involved, the Han and the Uyghur, to have more influence on how the source material is addressed or generated. On the Internet, they answer questions that they themselves formulate. These discussion threads can provide invaluable guidance on the types of questions the source material itself finds relevant. This study hopes to show that YouTube corroborates much of what current scholarship has determined are the important issues that complicated Han-Uyghur issues in addition to providing direction for future research.

Issue Framing and YouTube

Besides being viewed as answers to an open-ended survey or poll where the respondents, i.e., video posters and commentators, answer the questions they pose to themselves, the source material in YouTube can be viewed as a crude form of framing. This framing has the potential to influence the opinions of those passive viewers of the videos and commentary and the way they think about the source of ethnic strife between the Han and the Uyghur.

Often times there are vast differences between the actual factors involved in a contentious social issue and the way those factors are organized and presented to the public. Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley have argued that by framing social issues in certain ways, the framers can define the causes, consequences, and even the remedies to those problems.²³ They further remind us that framing can take very complex issues and oversimplify them into a problem caused by a couple of central factors.

²³ Thomas E. Nelson, Rosale A. Clawson and Zoe M. Oxley, "Media framing of a civil liberties conflict and its effect on tolerance," *American Political Science Review*, 91 (1997): 567-568.

Framing differs from persuasion in important ways. According to Nelson and Oxley, persuasion refers to changing the *content* of someone's beliefs, whereas framing attempts to alter the relative importance one attaches to any given belief.²⁴ Framers seek to categorize issues and proclaim what *the* core aspect of a specific issue really is. Nelson and Oxley maintain that framing influences opinion by identifying which of several potential conflicting considerations should predominate in the debate of a problem or issue. Haider-Markel and Joslyn have argued along similar lines, suggesting that issues can present individuals with the dilemma of choosing between competing and inconsistent considerations. Framing provides direction by suggesting which considerations are the most salient.²⁵

The framing in the YouTube videos took place on at least two levels. The first type of framing was accomplished through video and audio splicing as well as crafting the video titles. The second type occurred in the commentary as the participants debated what they believed were the most relevant issues.²⁶ Both types of framing, however, were crude and unpolished. The videos largely appeared to be made by amateurs, each with their own unrefined techniques, opinions, and biases while the commentary articulated was by average people voicing their views.

²⁴ Thomas E. Nelson, & Zoe Oxley, "Issue framing effects on belief importance and opinion," *The Journal of Politics*, 61, (1999): 1040-1041.

²⁵ Donald P. Haider-Markel and Mark R. Joslyn, "Gun policy, opinion, tragedy, and blame attribution: The conditional influence of frames," *The Journal of Politics*, 63 (2001): 522.

²⁶ Video posters have a great deal of control over what comments get posted to their videos, though it is not a given that it will always be exercised. Posters can allow all comments, block all comments, allow comments to be posted only after review, or the poster can selectively remove comments. Furthermore, the video poster can use automated filters that block posts with offensive language or offensive commentary such as racial slurs. It was the experience of the author, however, that of the videos selected for this analysis, none of them seemed to experience selective editing by the video poster. The videos, in general, each contained commentary that might be considered supportive to multiple perspectives on the core issues of Han-Uyghur relations.

It is the premise of this author that these frames presented on YouTube have the potential, like frames in traditional news sources, to effect the way the YouTube users and their associates perceive and interpret the issues that surround Han-Uyghur relations. More importantly, while the actual YouTube content may largely remain on YouTube servers located outside of China, the opinions and frames expressed within that content have the real probability of spreading into China as overseas Chinese with access to YouTube communicate with relatives in China and as students with the same access return to China to visit home or to work.

METHODS AND DATA

YouTube Research Methodology

The quantity of videos posted on YouTube is enormous. This paper did not seek to exhaust every video relating to this topic on YouTube. Such a project would be the scope of a book, and would use multiple search terms in Chinese, Pinyin, English, Uyghur, and possibly other Turkic languages. This project sought, in part, to test the possibility of such research on YouTube by addressing one small sliver of YouTube's related videos.

The author chose to use the search term “维吾尔族” which is the simplified character version of the Chinese word that translates into “Uyghur.” Using the Chinese characters as the search term ensured a larger concentration of commentary in Chinese characters. A cursory check of returns on the English language search term “Uyghur” shows that these videos also have a good deal of political content, but little of the commentary occurs in Chinese. Increasing the Chinese language content allowed some limited attribution, at least to opinions held by those literate in Chinese.

Search results on YouTube can be filtered by multiple factors such as volume of video accessing, date of post, viewer rating, categories the video was tagged under (i.e., entertainment, news and politics, etc), video duration, and others. The author chose to search through the returned results according to the default return setting, which was

based on “relevance.” Search results filtered with this setting produced a greater variety of video type and accessing volume. The commentary content and volume varied as a result.

Interestingly, some of the videos with the highest commentary rates had relatively small accessing rates. For example, one video with a total of 6,151 views at last access had generated 105 comments, or approximately 1 comment per 58 views. Another video had far more views-123,606 at last access-but not a corresponding increase in comments. This video had 584 comments, the largest commentary set of all videos examined. The accessing-comment rate for this video was 1 comment per 211 views. The above mentioned video with a smaller viewer rating had over 3.5 times the *per-accessing-*commentary as the video with a much larger viewership rate. The bottom line is that filtering videos in YouTube by number of views would have precluded some videos that had a large number, in both absolute and relative terms, of relevant commentary (for this topic).

General Description of Collected Results

The search term produced an estimated (by YouTube) 1,270 videos of which the author accessed the first 500 videos, less than 100 of which had relevant commentary. Of the approximate 100 videos, the author selected 61 videos to examine more carefully. Generally, these videos had the highest commentary volumes and should be considered a convenient sample. These 61 videos represent, at the last time of access, 770,993 instances of access and 4,250 posted comments. These numbers are still growing as almost all of these videos are still available on YouTube and are constantly being viewed and commented on. The oldest video reviewed was posted on December 18, 2006, the

most recent on March 19, 2010. Of the total selected videos, 41% were news clips, 26% were music and dancing, with 16% containing footage of violence purportedly in either Guangdong or Urumqi during the summer of 2009. In the following breakdowns, no one video was counted more than once.

The type of videos affected the volume of commenting and accessing. Videos that resulted in 100 or more comments, hereafter referred to as “extensive commentary videos,” were primarily footage of violence (50%) or news clips (43%). The average number of access instances was just over 35,000 (the lowest being in the 6,000 range and the highest up to 123,000; the average number of comments was 218 comments (Figure 2.1). Videos with relatively moderate commentary (41 to 99 comments), hereafter referred to as “moderate commentary videos,” were primarily news clips (50%), CCTV programming (17%), and violent footage (17%). The average number of access instances was over 14,600 views; the average number of posts was 60 comments (Figure 2.2).

Videos with the most limited number of commentary (1-40 comments), hereafter referred to as “nominal commentary videos,” were videos of music and/or dancing (43%) and news clips (37%) (Figure 2.3). Amateur videos, video segments, or news pieces that were not professionally produced or were firsthand footage of the 2009 violence composed 7-11% of all three commentary categories. One tentative conclusion can be made based on these dispositions: footage of violence and news clips drive online discussion of issues surrounding Han-Uyghur relations.

The commentary took place almost exclusively in three scripts: English, simplified Chinese characters, and traditional Chinese characters. The use of a specific language is not a smoking gun for the purposes of attribution. In other words, English

EXTENSIVE COMMENTARY VIDEO DISPOSITION

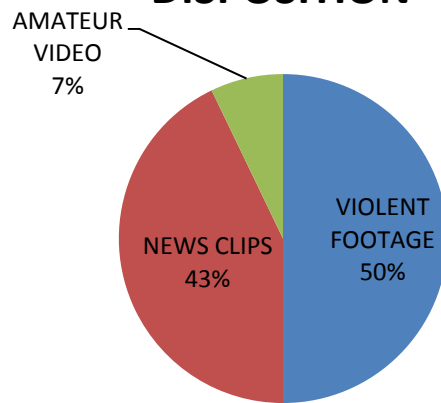


Figure 2.1 Extensive Commentary Video Disposition

MODERATE COMMENTARY VIDEO DISPOSITION

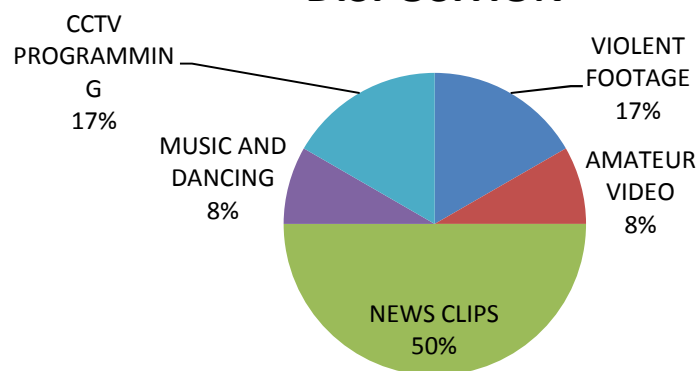


Figure 2.2 Moderate Commentary Video Disposition

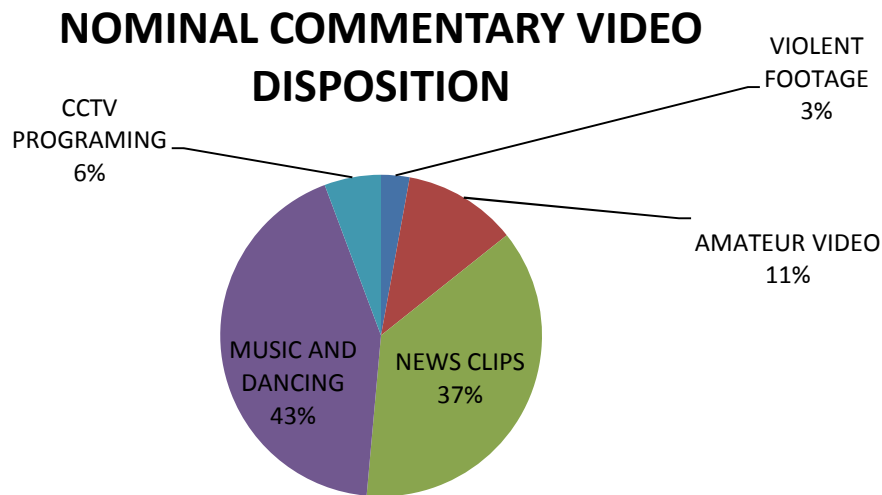


Figure 2.3 Nominal Commentary Video Disposition

does not mean “Uyghur supporter,” simplified Chinese does not mean China mainlander (or an overseas Chinese person from the mainland), and traditional Chinese characters does not denote the commentator is from Taiwan.

General Description of Collected Results Continued

Some computer programs or computers default to one Chinese script or another. Some computers are not uploaded with Chinese script, forcing a person with Chinese as his or her primary language to comment in English. The only conclusion that can be made is that if the comment was made in a Chinese script, then the person most likely had a command of the Chinese language. The same applies to English language commentary.

Finally, it is important to note how out of sync the commentary could be with the type of video on display. Generally speaking, videos of traditional Uyghur dances elicited commentary wholly disconnected with the dancing itself. For example, nearly

half of such videos contained commentary refuting the notion that the Uyghur were Chinese. These videos contained commentary regarding the concept of a multicultural China, the identity of the Uyghur, Xinjiang sovereignty, and to a much lesser degree Xinjiang terrorism and other topics. There does not seem to be a correlation between the type of video and the type of commentary.

It is as if dialogues occurring at kitchen tables, classrooms, and other offline venues, or even inside the heads of the YouTube users themselves, are suddenly evidenced on YouTube in response to “triggers,” which are seemingly the YouTube videos and associated content itself. YouTube can be seen as an online window into discussions that are taking place offline. YouTube videos are the pretext to discuss serious issues that are at times completely unrelated with the video itself. It is for this reason that the analysis of this study will largely restrict itself to the video titles and the commentary and not the videos themselves

UYGHUR NATIONAL IDENTITY

The Uyghur in Multicultural China

Turkish music fills the blackness as purple lighting slowly brightens to reveal a large group of female dancers, all dressed in red. The dancers all hold their pose as the camera focuses on two dancers isolated from the rest on the right hand side of a dance floor, who begin to dance. On the left hand side of the video image appears the characters “土豆网”, a signal to the viewer that this video has been uploaded from China’s Tudou.com website. Eventually, the entire group of women dances to the Turkish music and offstage vocals, which are presumably Uyghur with some portions in Chinese Mandarin. Nearly six minutes into the presentation, the dancing slows, the lights dim, and the music fades into the background.

The video is entitled “走向远方（维吾尔族 女子群舞）” or “Heading Toward a Distant Place (Uyghur Women Group Dancing).” What is interesting here is not the title, the content of the video, or even the intent with which the YouTube user posted the video.²⁷ The important detail is the one and only comment posted to this video which

²⁷ The particular poster, a minor that claims to live in the U.S. but originate from China, is very interested in dancing. This individual posts videos of Chinese (defined nationally) dance routines. As of 3 January 2011, this individual had posted 1,964 videos and had 1,028 YouTube subscribers to her videos.

was simple but full of meaning. Wrote the commentator: “dancers are all han Chinese.”²⁸
 What was the commentator getting at?²⁹

What could have precipitated such a response and why was it made? It appears that the commentator is engaging in his own version of representational politics. There is a very good chance this commentator was rejecting the right of the ethnic Han to interpret or portray the ethnic Uyghur or their customs. “Who gave the *Han* the right to perform *our* dances?” is what the commentator appears to take issue with. This situation was played out on separate videos with separate commentators who responded to similar videos of Uyghur traditional dancing by asserting that the dancers were all Han or at least not Uyghur, or that the dancers were incapable of dancing because of not being Uyghur.

At its core, this is not really about dancing or the authenticity of a single cultural presentation. The larger and real issue here is identity. Is the Uyghur cultural tradition part of the larger Chinese cultural tradition? Are Uyghurs and Han part of a shared national identity that would allow members of either ethnicity to represent a Uyghur dance, because at its core it is really a *Chinese* dance?

The appropriateness, even the reality, of a multicultural China was intensely disputed on the commentary portions of these videos. In some ways, this issue is the foundational piece of other frames, the key concept that either transforms rioters in Urumqi into freedom fighters, criminals, or terrorists. In extensive commentary videos, over a third of all videos had commentary providing support for the idea that all the ethnic groups in China are in fact nationally “Chinese” while retaining their ethnic

²⁸走向远方（维吾尔族女子群舞），” YouTube, Last accessed November 29, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iqcksNsqt9U>.

²⁹ To maintain consistency and clarity, “poster” refers to the individual that uploaded the video and “commentator” refers to the individuals who made comments on the videos.

identity; most of these came from commentators using Chinese characters. When the videos are taken as a whole, nearly a quarter had at least one comment making roughly this claim.

There was much more contention over the specific argument of whether the Uyghur ethnic group was nationally Chinese or not. Nearly 93% of the extensive commentary videos had commentary that asserted that the Uyghurs were Chinese.³⁰ Nearly 52% of the moderate commenting had commentary that asserted that the Uyghur were Chinese with 27% of nominal commentary videos having at least one comment asserting the same. In many cases, these videos had many more than one comment making this claim, most of which occurred in Chinese.

Only 21% of these types of extensive commentary videos contained comments disputing the notion that Uyghur's were Chinese. None of the moderate commentary videos contained the same, but 28% of the nominal commentary videos had at least one comment that disputed the idea. This should not be interpreted as a sign that the Uyghur or their supporters care less about their national identity than Chinese speakers do. These lower results may be due to the language composition of the returned results due to the search term used. This notwithstanding, it is clear that the national identity of the Uyghur is an important issue that appears in Uyghur-related YouTube videos.

Erafat

Videos involving the young Uyghur boy Erafat sparked similar debates over the issue of whether Uyghurs are Chinese or not. Erafat is, or was when the entertainment

³⁰ This and the following percentages do not represent hard statistical data; the survey is too small. These numbers are intended only to give a rough sense of the frequency at which the arguments appeared in the commentary.

pieces were performed, a young Uyghur boy, possibly around the age of eight, who performed various song and dance pieces in Mandarin Chinese. Many YouTube videos of Erafat were originally performed for CCTV and then later uploaded onto YouTube.

YouTube commentators argued back and forth about the identity of Erafat as a medium to discuss the national identity of the Uyghur. To some, his Mandarin language skills were incongruous with his background as a Uyghur. Here is evidence of the language issues that Kaltman and Clothey have identified as being crucial to the Uyghur national identity. Erafat defies the Uyghur ideal by maintaining excellent Mandarin language skills. He creates tension within the Uyghur ranks because he represents what Kaltman and Clothey have identified would be considered a sell-out to the Uyghur community, precisely because he speaks Mandarin so well.

To the other YouTube commentators, Erafat's language skills, and indeed mere existence, highlighted the validity of the Chinese multicultural national identity. To these commentators, Erafat was ethnically Uyghur and nationally Chinese, a symbol of every other Uyghur in China.

It would take too long to canvas all the Erafat videos (there are at least 193 Erafat videos on YouTube alone), but these at least show that even benign videos seemingly dedicated exclusively to entertainment can elicit weighty words. Erafat's dance routines carry ideological baggage that viewers readily see, contest, or defend. To some, he is a symbol of multicultural China and the fact that the Uyghurs are indeed Chinese. To others he is an aberration that does not prove one way or another the national identity of the Uyghur.

Flaming

During these disputations, both sides of the arguments denigrated each other in ways that portray the other as less civilized, even less than human. Uyghurs were referred to as “dregs,” “dogs,” “savages,” “bedbugs,” “trash,” “radical extremists,” “terrorists,” “prostitutes,” “whores,” “beasts,” “criminals,” “low class,” as well as other even courser terms. They were portrayed at times as a people that are morally bankrupt. In 78% and 77% of the extensive commentary and moderate commentary videos, respectively, the Uyghurs specifically, or Turks generally, were denigrated in some fashion.

The Chinese were also vilified, being called “pigs,” “inhuman,” “cowards,” “barbarians,” “criminals,” “communist bandits,” and of course, a “people with no culture.” In the extensive commentary and moderate commentary videos, Han specifically or Chinese in general were disparaged in some fashion on at least one occasion 64% and 46% of the time, respectively. This name-calling from both sides was consistent throughout the commentary and not isolated to singular statements on a few videos. These occurrences lend support to Bovingdon’s conclusion that the use of abusive colloquial language by the Uyghur at the Han casts doubt on ethnic harmony and solidarity in China. These are online expressions of what Bovingdon found offline in his interviews.

Arguments have been made that attempt to blame Internet verbal violence on the Internet’s ability to provide a netizen with anonymity. Referencing research on English-language internet newsgroups that demonstrated that verbal violence, or “flaming,” was not as common as first believed, Guobin Yang has built on this line of thinking by arguing that the use of violent language should be expected when social injustice issues

are discussed. To use Yang's words, "Crises of communication are rooted in crises of community."³¹

The use of violent language in these particular YouTube videos does not necessarily demonstrate that the commentators are crude people that seized an opportunity to lash out at the "Other" behind the veil of anonymity. Rather, this language demonstrates how passionately the commentators feel about the issues as well as the depth of this particular "crisis" of the Han-Uyghur "community." After all, many of the commentators had just watched a brutal killing.

Unfortunately, there were also calls for violence that would extend beyond the verbal on both sides of the debate. Using a variety of violent terminology, commentators called for acts of violence to include genocide in most commentary sections of the extensive and moderate commentary videos. Calls for violence directed at Uyghurs occurred in 71% of the extensive commentary videos and occurred in 54% of the moderate commentary videos. Averaging the two, a full quarter of the videos contained calls for violence directed against Muslims. Concerning violence directed at Han or Chinese, 50% of the extensive commentary videos contained some call for violence with the same occurring 23% of the time in the moderate commentary videos.

For the part of those that verbally denigrate the Uyghur, or call for their actual demise, what is occurring here is a failure to really accept the Uyghur as "Chinese." Could "savages" and "beasts" be considered Chinese? If the Uyghurs are uncivilized, then they are clearly not Chinese, much less if they are not even human. These participants are implicitly denying the Uyghur entry into the great Chinese culture and

³¹ Guobin Yang, *The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 183.

nationality, demonstrating cultural and conceptual fissures in the idea of what it means to be “Chinese.”

These brands of commentary point to a gap in the current scholarship. To what degree do the Han actually believe that the Uyghur belong in the Chinese national identity? Does the Han sense of Uyghur belonging extend beyond what is necessary to justify continued control over Xinjiang? These commentaries hint that the Han may not believe the rhetoric of a harmonious multi-ethnic nation as much as previously assumed. Herein we can see some of the utility in using YouTube as a tool to further refine and narrow traditional interview and survey projects.

Uyghur National Identity and Framing

Uyghur national identity really is a core issue upon which other issues and determinations hinge. The legitimacy of PRC control of the area known as Xinjiang depends on whether the Uyghur are nationally Chinese or not. If they are not, then there is a theoretical case for saying that Xinjiang is an “occupied territory” that should be returned to the Uyghur. The corollary is also true; if the Uyghurs are nationally Chinese, then the territory they inhabit is also Chinese.

National identity, however interpreted, also affects how one interprets Uyghur violence. If the Uyghurs are really Chinese nationals “rioting” in the streets and “attacking innocent civilians,” then the state is justified in meeting this with violent measures of their own, now legitimized to the populous at large. When, however, Uyghurs are framed as non-Chinese strangers in their own land, then Uyghurs become the victims. Indeed, it becomes much easier to describe them as “freedom fighters” standing up to an “oppressive” regime, a standard around which to rally. Government

crackdowns are not viewed as legitimate responses to violent unrest, rather they could be considered further abuses perpetrated by a tyrannical regime. In many ways, the national identity of the Uyghur is a lens through which many key issues are seen.

Finally, from the perspective of the Uyghur, these commentaries provide supporting evidence to what other scholars have concluded regarding Uyghur national identity. Here we see the online versions of the everyday resistance Bovingdon writes of, strengthening the Uyghur sense of separateness from the Chinese state. The racist attitudes Kaltman found in his interviews are replicated in the YouTube commentary on both sides of the equation. The important link between language and ethnic identity that Clothey identified is also evidenced in the source material. These commentaries also suggest that Beijing's concept of a multicultural Chinese national identity do not have the deep roots it claims among both the Han and the Uyghur, Tang and He's research notwithstanding. As such, they point to additional research needs, hitherto unaddressed. In these ways, YouTube compliments traditional research methods by pointing them in new directions and corroborating their conclusions.

LAND, HARD POLICIES, AND UYGHUR CRIMINALITY

Three other issues that one would expect to appear in the commentary based on the current scholarship are the issues of whether Xinjiang should be a part of China (part and parcel to some Uyghur's ambition for complete independence), whether or not the Uyghur are oppressed by China's hard policies, and the notion of Uyghur criminality. Xinjiang political status is featured prominently in the commentary, as is Uyghur criminality, but Uyghur oppression barely appears to be an issue according to these commentary strings.

Eastern Turkistan or Xinjiang?

A group of Chinese people gathered on a city street shouting and waving small Chinese flags at a few others who appear to be holding small flags of another nationality. The others leave and the shouting ceases; the Chinese people mill around. The video is spliced and suddenly shows the Chinese people converging to wave and shout at a woman walking down the street clad in a Tibetan flag. The woman waves the flag above her head as she walks off. The video is again spliced, shifting to a scene of the Chinese shouting “中国! (China) China! 中国! China!” They are yelling at other individuals carrying or waving the Tibetan flag. One of these individuals shouts back “Viva Tibet! (Long Live Tibet!).” The shouting peters out and the video ends.³²

³² “HAN CHINESE RULE THE WORLD, UYGHURS, URUMQI, XINJIANG,” YouTube, Last accessed December 9, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EJ9y8eIVnCc>.

Ironically, this video was entitled “HAN CHINESE RULE THE WORLD, UYGHURS, URUMQI, XINJIANG.” This particular poster has only uploaded two videos, both having the exact title. Whatever the content of the actual video, the real point seems to be encapsulated in the title itself: Xinjiang is a part of China. The timing of this video is also relevant. Whenever the events portrayed in the video took place, the video was posted to YouTube on July 10, 2009. Besides being a declaration of Han dominance, this video appears to be seeking to participate in the riots and protests of July 2009, albeit virtually.

Closely linked with the argument of what it means to be Uyghur is the contested status of Xinjiang. Roughly two-thirds of the extensive and moderate commentary videos contained some challenge to the notion that the area of Xinjiang is a part of China. Nearly half of the same videos had commentary that made the assertion that it was a part of China. These types of commentaries were usually found on videos of violent footage or news clips. Additionally, there were 57 instances in all the commentary of the words “Eastern Turkistan,” “Uyghurstan,” or some variation of the same.

Predictably, there was quite a bit of commentary affirming Chinese control of Xinjiang. Demonstrating the preoccupation of another potential division of China, there were 68 instances of the word “split” (or splittist) in both English and Chinese throughout the commentary.³³ Some of those preoccupied with affirming Chinese sovereignty over Xinjiang appealed to history to support their claims. These comments were by no means entirely historically accurate, but all would cite some historical “fact” highlighting the illegitimacy of Uyghur assertions of sovereignty over Xinjiang or to bolster the PRC’s

³³ A “splittist” is a word in Chinese that refers to an individual that endeavors to separate a portion of China’s territory from the political and geographic control of the Peoples Republic of China.

claim over the same. It seems clear that the politically motivated histories of which Bovington writes are being consumed and subsequently being re-represented (or misrepresented) on YouTube.

This indicates a bleed-over effect of intellectual ideas. Chinese nationalism-motivated or PRC-sponsored histories of Xinjiang are being spread outside of China on the Internet to defend China's territorial claims. This is a two way street, however. Whoever is propagating these versions of history are also exposed to the other ideas and frames being aired on YouTube and can spread them in the same circles where they were first exposed to the histories.

Some commentators pointed to demographics in Xinjiang to refute Uyghur claims to sovereignty of Xinjiang. Wrote one in simplified Chinese Characters: "The thing I can't stand the most is to have some exiled Uyghur dogs suddenly start claiming everywhere that all of Xinjiang belongs to the Uyghur. They are completely carried away! They not only seem to have forgotten the Han right in front of their eyes, but also the Hui of east Xinjiang and the Mongols of the northern Zunghar!"³⁴ Embedded in a historical argument, another individual asserted that the Uyghurs only constitute 40% of the population of Xinjiang.

Those that opposed Chinese control of Xinjiang were much less articulate in expressing their views. These expressions of defiance were largely confined to slogans like "EASTERN TURKISTAN!!!!" and other variations. Expressions like this encapsulate the general level of articulation of Uyghur political aspirations. This was probably due to the search term used. It is very likely commentary that opposed Chinese

³⁴ "Uyghur dance Uyghur Usuli 新疆风光-维吾尔族歌舞," YouTube, Last accessed November 29, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RK8EK0tjg8>.

claims of sovereignty, or expressed other more moderate political goals, would be much more thoroughly articulated had videos been found using a Uyghur or English language search term. It is very likely that the commentaries negating Chinese control were informed by the alternate histories of Xinjiang propagated by pro-Uyghur intellectuals that Bovingdon has alluded to. These ideas are not being incubated in a vacuum, and this study postulates that research conducted in Uyghur on YouTube would find striking similarities between these histories and the video commentary.

Hard Policies

Quiet mystical music accompanies majestic vistas of the Kunlun Mountains in Xinjiang. Xinjiang's natural and manmade beauties are shown from above revealing stunning landscapes.³⁵ Buddhist art along with ancient indigenous rock and cave carvings present themselves to the viewer. The music changes to a much more upbeat tone as colorfully clad minorities smile as they dance or engage in traditional economic activities. Children happily run down a street beside what appears to be a mosque. The viewers are then taken to the grasslands of Xinjiang where an unidentified group of minorities engage in traditional equestrian games. Clean yurts and a woman dressed in a gown of deep red and snow white twirls for the camera. Men in richly colored minority traditional clothing smoke in the lush green fields or teach their youth the art of playing customary instruments.

Golden fields of grain grab the attention of the viewers as they are taken on a journey of agricultural discovery. Ample melons and plump fruits are harvested by colorfully dressed minorities. An oil rig slowly pumps oil from the well in front of the

³⁵ CCTV9 is a CCTV channel dedicated to English language programming.

backdrop of a beautiful sunset. Wind farms, industrial plants, and manufacturing factories highlight Xinjiang's booming economy. Minority merchants happily peddle their wares in Urumqi. Overhead views of the city and its highways and fast-forwarded clips of pedestrians give the impression of a bustling city. Uyghur dancers in exotic costumes light up Urumqi's nightlife. A firework display set over a bridge spanning a beautiful river concludes the video as the music fades.

This video was entitled "[beautiful_china] Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region 新疆维吾尔自治区," and like its title suggests, displays Xinjiang from its most attractive vantage points.³⁶ This is a nine-minute section of a much larger CCTV9 program. There is no audio other than the music, but the scenes are complimented with English subtitles. CCTV9 is CCTV's English language programming channel, and this program seems designed to communicate ideas central to the Chinese government's framing of Xinjiang and its peoples.

This video highlights one of the frame dichotomies—are the Uyghur oppressed in China or not? The above video appeared designed to give the overall impression that the non-Han peoples of Xinjiang, to include the Uyghur, are happy, thriving, and not oppressed. Even the herdsmen living in remote areas of Xinjiang have the cleanest and brightest of traditional clothing, showing that not only are they doing well economically but were also afforded the freedom to live in traditional ways. One is left to wonder, “How can the Uyghurs claim to be oppressed when they have a vibrant economy, beautiful unexploited landscape in which to live, and freedom of cultural and religious

³⁶ “[beautiful_china] Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region 新疆维吾尔自治区,” YouTube, Last accessed December 9, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CbrxwouHXHU>.

expression?” There is no evidence of the hard policies Rudelson and Jankowiak reference.

One might expect claims that the Chinese government was abusing the Uyghur people to be ubiquitous in the commentary, but this type of commentary is very sparse indeed. There should have been a lot of commentary on China’s mosque closings, police crackdowns, and restrictions on Uyghur expressions nationalism. This was the biggest omission in the source material. Chinese oppression, or hard policies directed at the Uyghur, were mentioned only 96 times throughout the commentary.³⁷ This pales in comparison with the frequency of key terminology usage of other issues.

This issue was best articulated by apologists that attempted, albeit infrequently, to argue that the Uyghur were, if not well treated in China, treated better there than they would be in the U.S. or in Arab nations. These commentators cited restrictions of freedom of religion in the Arab world, affirmative action measures in China (ironically), and vague assertions that the Uyghur would be treated terribly in the U.S.

In particular, one homemade video maintained that the minorities were better off in China as a result of the economic development the minority areas have received. The video, named "uighurs ,xinjiang- china treat them not bad," maintains that the Aborigines of Australia and the Eskimos of Canada and other minorities have benefited from the economic development provided by their governments. The implication was that the benefits the Aborigines and Eskimos enjoyed were paralleled in China among the “indigenous” population-the Uyghur. Predictably, the assertions of this video were contested even though there had been less than 700 instances of accessing.

³⁷ "墮胎" (abortion), "歧視" (discriminate), "資源" (natural resources-with respect to stealing resources from the Uyghur or Xinjiang), "genocide," "abort," "steal" (and variants-with respect to stealing resources of the Uyghur or Xinjiang), "discriminate (and variants), "persecute" (and variants), "resources."

So Uyghur oppression did emerge in the commentary and videos, but very infrequently and largely among Chinese apologists rather than angry Uyghur supporters. The author postulates that a study conducted in the Uyghur or English language would produce entirely different results. Limitations in English or Chinese language abilities probably had more to do with this omission than Beijing's implementation of hard policies in Xinjiang not being a salient issue. The comments made by the apologists are evidence in-and-of themselves that it is an issue. The author concludes that these commentary strings do not invalidate earlier scholarly work, and that a more comprehensive search of YouTube using the Uyghur language would uncover evidence corroborating the same.

Uyghur Criminality

Soft piano music provides the backdrop of a series of slides depicting petty thieves robbing pedestrians. The voice of a young man asks “Look, if you had one shot, or one opportunity, to seize everything you ever wanted, in one moment, would you capture it, or just let it slip?” The man's voice is replaced by a rap song, in what could be a Turkish language and later in English that continues to provide the beat for a continuing stream of images of pick pockets and the profiles of alleged Uyghur thieves.³⁸

This video is entitled “Uygur thieves ! ! ! 維吾爾小偷在合肥 (Uyghur Petty Thieves in Hefei).” The implication, of course, is that all the images are of Uyghur thieves. The amount of commentary that focused on Uyghur criminality was staggering. There were 386 key word references to crime, the largest being thievery. It seemed an accepted fact among most of the commentators that addressed Uyghur criminality that the

³⁸ “UYGHUR THIEVES!,” YouTube, Last accessed November 29, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAQdcm0WuV0&feature=fvsr>.

Uyghur people as a whole are thieves. Commentary that addressed Uyghur criminality did not attempt to explain the problems surrounding Han-Uyghur relations. Rather, it was spread throughout the language of other commentary. This does not mean, however, that this language does not have significant potential effects in framing.

It is hard to sympathize with a thief, and whether there are numerous Uyghur thieves or not is beside the point. “Uyghurs are thieves,” is a powerful generalization that makes it difficult to empathize with the Uyghur’s current predicament. Their poverty, after all, must be a product of their criminal tendencies, right? The broad generalization that portrays the Uyghur people as thieves is a de-facto frame. It is a frame of Han victimization at the hands of Uyghur criminals. Uyghur “indignity” to Xinjiang, or Uyghur poverty and economic disenfranchisement must take a back seat to other more important considerations.

There is also evidence that YouTube videos can “activate” the potency of certain ideas that have hitherto been rejected. Consider the following example. After accessing a YouTube video of a news report on the 2009 Uyghur violence, one commentator using simplified Chinese characters declared: “I am Han, and have never rejected other nationalities. However, from now on I am going to change. After f****ing your mom, the moment I see a Xinjiang thief I am going to beat him to death.”³⁹

Assuming we can take this individual at his word, the individual had no issues with the Uyghur until “witnessing” the ethnic violence in Xinjiang through the medium of a YouTube video. After experiencing the violence virtually, the individual had a

³⁹ “Uigur de Xinjiang 2009 年 07 月 06 日 1/3 乌鲁木齐市 新疆维吾尔自治区 吾尔开希,” YouTube, Last accessed November 29, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ns-exIiq9ME>.

radical change of heart. This is suggestive that for good or for ill, YouTube videos have the potential to polarize the issues surrounding Han-Uyghur relations.

Important to this discussion is the use of the epithet “thief.” It appears that this individual readily adopted the slur after changing positions, whereas before it seemed to hold no salience in the individual’s thinking. The notion that Uyghurs are thieves may now pepper this individual’s discussion of Han-Uyghur relations and place paradigm restraints on the way this individual conceptualizes the issues. This individual appears to have been “framed.” Finally, these findings in these videos and associated commentary also lend support to Kaltman’s findings that the Han commonly view the Uyghur as thieves and criminals-an online expression of what Kaltman discovered offline.

CAUSALITY AND PROGNOSTICS

The image of a street comes to life from what is probably an exterior security camera; there is no sound. On the top right hand side of the screen, the numbers appear “2009-07-05 20:53:45”; the bottom left hand corner has the words “通道八,” or “Thoroughfare 8.” Two to three dozen people roam the street. Suddenly they spot a vehicle traversing the area and force it to come to a stop. They begin beating the car with their feet, hands, and some unidentifiable object that appears to be made of wood. In a bid for escape, the car backs up quickly but is forced to the side of the street by the roaming people who recommence attacking the car. There must be fifty people now crowding to join in on the violence. Several have metal pipes and the front windshield is virtually destroyed. An official-looking vehicle with lights installed on the front top of the vehicle appears and the mob backs away from the car, but the ambulance continues on its way leaving the area.

A man carrying a body scurries across the street as the mob returns and attempts to dislodge the vehicle’s driver from the car. The driver, a male, makes one last attempt to move the car away from the scene before giving up and attempting an escape through the empty space that was his front windshield. A pedestrian crosses the street, but not before she looks both ways for traffic.

The driver falls back into the car, is removed from the driver’s side, and is then subjected to a brutal beating with the metal pipes that have already destroyed his car. Taking a break from the pipes, the mob jumps on the body and kicks it viciously. The

man attempts to crawl away into the middle of the street but the mob follows and the beating continues. Finally, the body lies still and the mob leaves it to bleed in the street. It took two minutes from the time that the man accidentally arrived at that street before his body lay mutilated and bleeding on the ground, dead. The camera zooms in on the destroyed car; its windshield wipers move up and down, swatting the empty air and the last piece of broken windshield. A woman inspects the damage of the car, picks up a pipe and throws it in the direction of the body, now off screen. She laughs with the others.⁴⁰

This video produced a firestorm of commentary, one of which centered on the ambulance that left the scene of a brutal beating without offering assistance. Improperly identifying the ambulance as a police vehicle, indignant Chinese speakers wonder angrily why the police chose to leave the scene of the crime. This assumption was later corrected by those that recognized the vehicle as an ambulance.

The commentary here is angry, but some of the anger is directed at the Chinese state, or organs of it. One commentator using simplified Chinese characters bemoaned that no one will protect them and that they had to depend on their fists to punish the rioters. Wrote one commentator in simplified Chinese characters:

...The police are nowhere to be seen. If the police can control the video camera long distance then why can't they come and put a stop (to the incident). Did they really go to protect the big government buildings? The people depend on you and you behave like this? I'm so mad!

Another demanded an investigation be brought against the police officers presumed to be inside the ambulance that did nothing. The commenter wondered why they did not offer assistance. Did they not see what was occurring? Were they scared, or

⁴⁰ “乌鲁木齐 7.5 维族暴徒惨绝人寰的行径（私家车司机惨死），” YouTube, Last accessed November 29, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dua5sa8j9a0&has_verified=1.

were they simply indifferent to the beatings? The commentary continued condemning the police, the government's weakness, and even its ethnic policies.

Commentaries that blamed some portion of the Chinese government were a common thread that persisted in all types of videos, though almost entirely within news clips and violent footage. The government was, as one might expect, not the only entity blamed for the violence and the interethnic problems between the Uyghur and the Han. The Uyghur, Islam itself, terrorism, the Chinese people, and even the West or their media were all blamed for the problems.

It is in this commentary where Han-Uyghur ethnic strife diagnostics occur and with that, the implied or explicitly articulated prognostics on how to fix the problems. Through the following assignments of blame come the perceived needed changes that will resolve these problems, at least according to YouTube users.

Blaming the Chinese Government

As has been stated, the Chinese government was blamed for the Uyghur-Han ethnic tensions and the violence between the two groups. This type of commentary breaks completely with what is known according to current scholarship. In 78% of extensive and moderate commentary videos, some aspect of the Chinese government was blamed for these problems. Indeed, between the extensive and moderate commentary videos, 41% of such videos criticized China's ethnic policy relative to the "Uyghur problem." Speaking in more general terms, there were 175 instances of key word usage

that related to China's ethnic policy or to a broader discussion of the government's handling of minorities.⁴¹

Criticism of the Chinese government's handling of the Uyghurs broke out into three basic concerns, the first being that the government was coddling the Uyghur with their affirmative action measures. The second was that the police or judicial system was too soft or lenient on Uyghur criminality, and the third saw all the conflict as a consequence of Chinese governmental oppression on both Han and Uyghur alike.

To some Chinese language users, the Uyghurs were given too many privileges allowing them to defy laws, human and divine. In 42% of the extensive and moderate commentary videos, there were comments indicating that the Uyghurs or minorities were the recipients of special privileges. In almost all cases, this was resented or seen as a problem. In a slightly humorous tone, one commentator using simplified Chinese characters delineated a class system in China which typified the main thrust much of this type of commentary:

港台人为一等人 (Hong Kong and Taiwan residents -1st Class)

维吾尔，藏族人为二等人 (Uyghurs and Tibetans-2nd Class)

其他少数民族为三等人 (All other minorities-3rd Class)

汉族在大陆是四等人 (Mainland Hans-4th Class)⁴²

The second large issue that many commentators had with the Chinese government was their belief the Chinese legal and judicial system was mishandling Uyghur violence

⁴¹ This number includes every instance of the following Chinese and English words: "特权" and "特權" (special privilege), "手软" (soft hearted), "优待" and "優待" (preferential treatment), "政策" (policy), "privilege," "soft," "prefer" (and all variants), "favor," "special," (when associated with rights or benefits), "policy," and "ethnic."

⁴² "维吾尔族青年 VS 汉族中年人 街头纠纷," YouTube, Last accessed November 29, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rTtNqdQ71Q0>.

and crime. In 57% of the extensive commentary videos, there were some expressions that the police were being too soft or lenient on the Uyghurs. The angry commentary raged that arrested Uyghur criminals were being released without being charged, that the police were neglecting their duties towards Uyghur crime, and that the police were unable to protect the population. The following comment made in simplified Chinese characters was representative of much of this type of commentary:

Brothers, you all know that the Uyghur thieves are evil. If you come to the mainland you will know that in every large city in China they all have these beasts that steal things. In order to protect the minorities, the police will not dare arrest them. If you go to stop them from stealing on the streets it will be you that gets beaten...⁴³

The third issue suggested that these conflicts were a product of CCP oppression that negatively affected both the Han and the Uyghur. This was a much smaller group of commentary that essentially argued that there was nothing inherently wrong between the two groups and that the ethnic problems they suffered were created, in one way or another, by the Chinese government.

There are several ideas going on here, but one large overarching frame-it is all the government's fault. Either the government is too indulgent, too lenient, or too oppressive; regardless, the government is to blame. That the Chinese government would be implicated as a source of the trouble for one reason or another is not new. The notion that overseas Chinese would blame the Chinese government for being too generous to the Uyghur and thus create or aggravate Han-Uyghur strife seems to be a new idea.⁴⁴

⁴³ "UYGHUR THIEVES!," YouTube, Last accessed November 29, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAQdcm0WuV0&feature=fvsr>.

⁴⁴ The author presumes here that the international Uyghur community and Uyghur activists are not behind the commentary that accuses the PRC of being too generous to the Chinese Uyghur population.

There are important *potential* implications with this tentative conclusion. First, to the degree with which the views of these young, educated, and upwardly mobile individuals of Chinese descent represent the views of their corresponding demographic in China, it could indicate that there is dissatisfaction with current ethnic policy in China and that future outbursts of violence may be attributed not only to “unruly” Uyghurs but also to an “incapable” or “apathetic” central government. This could pose a threat to the legitimacy of the CCP if it is perceived to be mishandling minority issues at the expense of the Han majority by the next generation of influential and educated citizens.

Second, with respect to prognostics, the Chinese government is criticized for being too lenient and indulgent of the Uyghur. This frame demands that the government crack down on the Uyghur and restrict the affirmative action measures they enjoy. If the perceived cause of Han-Uyghur strife lies with the government, then so does the perceived solution—some change is deemed as necessary with the Chinese government or its ethnic policies.

Third, as we have seen from some of the commentary and the videos themselves, digital content and the ideas associated with them are not static. They move across geographic and political boundaries. Just as historical assumptions make their way from China to YouTube, as shall be seen in the commentary that addresses the ideal status of Xinjiang, so could determinations of the cause of Han-Uyghur ethnic strife make their way from YouTube to China.

To what degree this idea has taken hold in the minds of viewership of these videos, it is impossible to say. One can cautiously argue that the *potential* for these ideas to spread is enormous. Seventy-seven percent of the videos with extensive-to-moderate

commentary contained comments that blamed the Chinese government in some way for the ethnic strife, mostly made in Chinese characters. These videos reached a total of over 582,000 “accesses” as of the last time the author checked the videos. While one cannot measure effect, one can speak to some degree about the potential for impact, and the potential for these ideas to influence the thinking of the young overseas Chinese is great.

Finally, these commentaries also point to a whole new line of research. New interview sets and surveys could be geared around the question that attempts to ascertain to what degree the Han blame the Chinese government for poor Han-Uyghur relations and why.

Blaming Terrorism and Islam

The following comment, in its entirety, appeared in response to a video footage portraying alleged Uyghur violence in Urumqi: “muslim=terrorism.”⁴⁵ It exemplifies the type of commentary that demonstrates a poorly articulated notion that somehow Han-Uyghur ethnic strife was the fault of terrorists and Islam, which sometimes appeared to be the same thing. Very few commentators expressed any concrete idea that blamed these problems on Islam or terrorism. Rather, just like in the case of Uyghur criminality, terminology implicating Islam was woven into the language of other arguments.

Roughly a third of extensive and moderate commentary videos placed the blame on either terrorists or splittists, words that were used at times interchangeably. Words relating to terrorism appeared 232 times throughout the commentary.⁴⁶ Nearly 43% of

⁴⁵ “7月5日乌鲁木齐市维吾尔族暴徒的惨绝人寰的行径 (7.5 维族暴徒杀人视频,” YouTube, Last accessed November 29, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDD5waedS4I>.

⁴⁶ “恐怖分子” (terrorist), “恐怖袭击” (terrorist attack), “恐怖組織” (terrorist organization), “恐怖主义” (terrorism), “激进分子” (extremist), “偏激”(extreme), “激烈” (intense-associated with terrorism in some

the extensive commentary videos contained some attribution of blame to Islam. This occurred far fewer times in the other videos with less commentary. Religious terms (especially Islamic terms) appeared 699 times throughout the commentary.⁴⁷

Clearly, there is a fixation with terrorism and the Muslim faith and how that impacts Han-Uyghur relations. As Rudelson, Jankowiak, and Bovingdon have reminded us, the Uyghur have been deliberately inserted into the narrative of terrorism. The commentary in the YouTube videos is suggestive that the rhetoric has been successful in determining how Han-Uyghur relations are framed.

This type of framing does not lend itself well to groups of people with serious social grievances. For instance, terrorists do not have social injustice grievances, just radical ideas they intend to violently enforce. Broad acceptance that the Uyghur are terrorists could very well lead to broad acceptance of heavy-handed measures implemented to deal with the “terrorists.”

The preoccupation with Islam is also unhelpful. Connecting Islam in general with alleged Uyghur acts of violence in specific and the vague idea of terrorism in the background will do nothing to engender tolerance in or outside China. Uyghurs are understood by some to be violent specifically because they are Muslim. This type of causality determination can only lead down a troubling road of unhelpful prognostics. If the problem lies with Islam, than curtailing Islamic activities in some way is the logical outcome.

way), "terrorist," terrorism," "radical," "extremist" (and variants). "Splittist" and its variants were not included in this count.

⁴⁷ "宗教" (religion) and other religion-related combinations using "教," "穆斯林" (Muslim), "伊斯兰" and "伊斯蘭" (Islam), "圣战" and "聖战" (Jihad), "religion," "muslim," "Islam/Islamic," "Jihad."

Blaming the Uyghur, the Chinese, and the West

As one would expect, the Uyghur and the Chinese were generally blamed as the source of Han-Uyghur ethnic strife. Two-thirds of extensive and moderate commentary videos contained commentary accusing the Uyghur; in nearly 42% of the extensive the moderate commentary videos, there was some blame placed on the Chinese (or Han) people themselves.

The West was blamed in a variety of capacities in these videos and their accompanying commentary. The main culprits were the West and in particular the Western media and the U.S. As one individual wrote in simplified Chinese characters, “The Han-Uyghur contradiction is because your gang will oppose the CCP regardless of everything and support Kadeer’s scheme of Xinjiang independence and splitting up China which was created by the American dogs.”⁴⁸ There were other theories aired that implicated the West, the most outlandish being that the “Uyghur criminals” were backed by the U.S. and funded by the Saudi Arabian Royal family.⁴⁹

Unarticulated Causalities

Equally important to who was blamed for these problems was who, or what, was *not* blamed. Below is a chart that attempts to determine which issues were the most salient for the YouTube commentators that participated in the videos, and which were not. Religion is the single most frequent word grouping (Figure 5.1). As has been noted before, the lines blurred between religion and terrorism and if tallied together would

⁴⁸ “广东韶关杀维吾尔人事件,” YouTube, Last accessed November 29, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFNfBhUHhck>.

⁴⁹ “新疆烏魯木齊暴動近 160 死,” YouTube, Last accessed November 12, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1b1ySRqFCHg>.

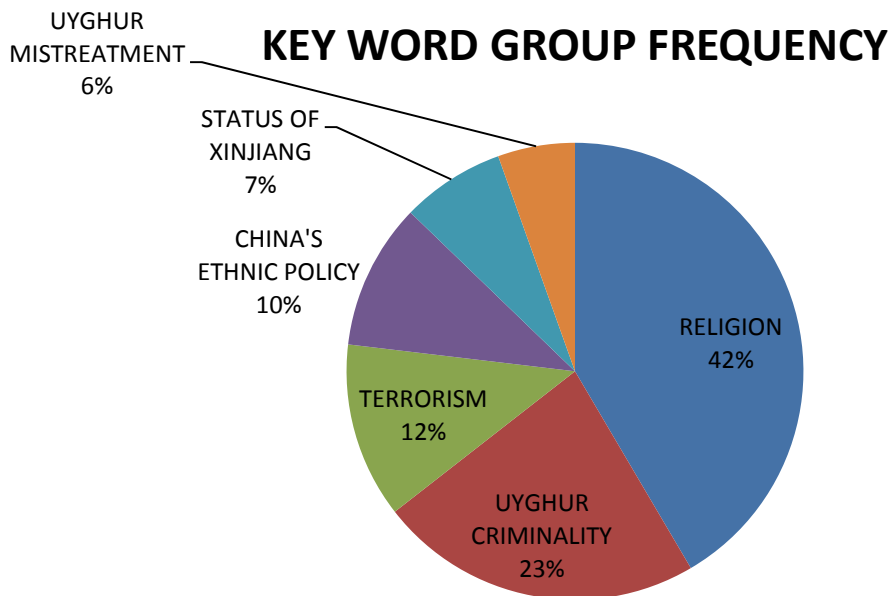


Figure 5.1 Key Word Group Frequency

constitute over half of all key word instances. The second most relevant topic was Uyghur criminality followed by China's ethnic policy. The status of Xinjiang and the mistreatment of the Uyghur come in last place. Islam, Uyghur criminality and terrorism seem to dominate the rhetoric. What do *not* dominate the rhetoric are the issues of Uyghur poverty, cultural preservation, nor the hard policies adopted by Beijing.

There was almost no mention of Uyghur poverty as a source of the problems that face the Uyghur and Han. Almost nothing was said about the language difficulties the Uyghur's face and how that impacted their ability to successfully integrate into China's economy. Kaltman's observations between language and economic success are largely ignored in the commentary. Issues of cultural preservation were not generally raised. Han migration into Xinjiang highlighted by Rudelson and Jankowiak is largely absent as well. While racism and negative generalizations are evident in the commentary, this issue was largely ignored as a problem in and of itself.

As a result, the commentary did not suggest or imply that the Uyghur should be helped to become effective bilingual citizens. There was little mention of how the Uyghur could effectively integrate with the economy while maintaining a strong sense of cultural identity. In short, most of the suggested or implied solutions from the causalities discussed would mean more crackdowns and more restrictions for the Uyghurs without addressing the issues that scholarship has identified as being central to the problems that surround Han-Uyghur relations. This is not to say that the current scholarship has misidentified the core issues; rather, this search, which centered on a term in Chinese language characters, has probably produced a data set which disproportionately represents Chinese views.

CONCLUSION

Corroborating Evidence

The issues that fuel Han-Uyghur ethnic tensions are real and serious. They are also a matter of life and death, a fact to which many of the videos could attest. YouTube has been able to contribute to our understanding of these issues. In many cases, the YouTube evidence supported what scholars have already concluded; however, in the case of Tang and He, it refuted their findings. YouTube also shed light on lesser understood issues pointing to future research needs.

Contrary to Tang and He's findings, this study supports Bovington's assessment that many Uyghur reject the Chinese national identity that the Chinese government wishes them to adopt. Contention over Uyghur national identity appeared over and over again in the YouTube commentary, with numerous rejections of the notion that the Uyghur were nationally Chinese surfacing in the most benign of videos. The obsession with this issue seemed so strong that it was brought up no matter how incongruous it may have been with the actual video content.

The link between language and identity that Kaltman and Clothey discovered became apparent in the commentary as well. The young Uyghur boy Erafat's Mandarin language skills highlighted this connection. His deviation from the "ideal" of having poor Mandarin language skills caused consternation among some because his linguistic abilities bolstered China's claim of having a multiethnic nation. This was not lost on

other commentators who pointed out that it was natural for a Uyghur to speak Chinese since he was nationally Chinese. Additionally, the tone of the commentary and some of its content suggest that the professions notwithstanding, the Han may not actually embrace the Uyghur as a member of the greater Chinese culture and consequently, Chinese identity. Further research might be undertaken to assess to what degree the Han embrace the notion of a multicultural nation that includes the Uyghur.

Questions of national identity are intimately linked with questions of land. Hence, the status of Xinjiang was pronounced in the commentary as well. Those supporting a China-controlled Xinjiang articulated their views through historical narratives, accurate and inaccurate, and a preoccupation with splittists. Those that advocated an Eastern Turkistan were much less articulate, something probably attributable to the language of the search term used rather than signifying a lack of commitment to that ideal. Evidence of discontent with Beijing's hard policies aimed at quelling resistance to Chinese rule in Xinjiang, and discontent with other alleged forms of oppression against the Uyghur, were conspicuously absent in the commentary. This author presumes this to be another issue that would be more pronounced in the commentary if a Uyghur language search term was used to produce the data set.

Justification for Beijing's hard policies can be found through Beijing's narrative of terrorism, which Bovingdon has highlighted. The commentary suggests that these rhetorical tools have been adopted by the nonelite and are used to largely to bolster other arguments. Allusions to terrorism and Islam were woven into the discussions of other issues found in the commentary. Like the rhetoric of terrorism, the rhetoric of criminality also littered the commentary. Kaltman's findings that, generally speaking, the Han

believe the Uyghur to be thieves were substantiated by a great deal of commentary in the Chinese language to that effect.

This study also alluded to the potentiality that the Han majority in China are dissatisfied with their government's ethnic minority policy. There was a great deal of commentary accusing the government of treating the Uyghur too generously and skewing the legal and judicial system in their favor. In the words of one commentator, the Han are "Fourth Class Citizens." Further research should be undertaken to ascertain to what extent this sentiment is shared among the Han majority.

This research also points to problematic issue framing, which is occurring on a segment of the internet with a potentially large reach. The framing identified on these videos tends to ignore some of the key issues that could produce helpful prognostics, such as finding meaningful solutions to Uyghur poverty, bridging the language divide, and blunting some of Beijing's hard policies. Instead, many of these frames focus on Uyghur criminality and their escapes from justice as a result of misguided government policies. These frames are delivered in the rhetoric of terrorism, tainted with racism, and with a preoccupation with Islam, which is seen as dangerous. All of these frames trend towards solutions that would exacerbate Han-Uyghur relations, not help them.

Finally, it is hoped that this project can be seen as a case study for how the Internet can serve as a complimentary source to traditional sources. There was a great deal of corroboration of evidence that occurred in this study. YouTube and other Internet sites have the potential to serve in the same way for other research topics. This study has demonstrated new avenues for research based on content found in YouTube but not in traditional research. Again, YouTube and other Internet sites could be used as

nontraditional tools to find research gaps that could be later filled using traditional sources. Internet research has the potential to form an important symbiotic relationship with traditional research.

YouTube as a Source

This study is as much about Internet methodology, YouTube in particular, as it is about the Uyghur and Han. So far, no clear methodology has been identified that would allow consistent and meaningful research to occur on a site such as YouTube. This study addressed this methodological gap and in so doing was able to tease out, though not entirely solve, some of the methodological problems associated with the Internet, namely attribution, data filtering, quantitative analysis, and language.

Research on the Internet is riddled with problems of attribution. How does one know when one can attribute an Internet blog, comment posting, or video posting to an individual in particular or to a certain demographic? Ultimately, one cannot make any definitive attribution. Just as an email from a “twenty-year-old girl” may be from a forty-year old man, so a comment from a “Uyghur” may be from an ethnic Han. Thus any approach to the Internet must be done on a large scale.

In particular, attribution is meaningless, but in mass and in large numbers, some attribution can be made when a general trend in statements (made through blogs, comments, videos etc.) can be associated with user demographics as ascertained by Internet metric research. Due to problems with attribution, Internet research will probably struggle to produce stand-alone conclusions. This study certainly does not claim to do so.

Internet sources can compliment traditional sources, however. Earlier scholarly work on Han-Uyghur relations largely depended either on personal interviews or surveys, all attributable, but all located in China. Face-to-face interviews present almost no difficulties with respect to attribution, but can face challenges with openness and honesty, more especially when conducted in countries known for restrictions on the freedom of expression. Internet sources, while they struggle with their own set of problems, attribution not the least, have the potentiality to provide “respondents” that are more open and honest, precisely because attribution is so difficult to ascertain. When conclusions from traditional sources are corroborated by Internet sources, confidence in the original conclusions is strengthened because of the “limitations” of Internet sources. It is hoped that this study has shown just that with respect to current scholarship on Han-Uyghur relations.

Data filtering can be a nightmare on YouTube. How does one filter all the videos on YouTube? This one search term, “维吾尔族,” produced an estimated 1,270 video results. Any large project would involve multiple search terms in the three most relevant languages-Uyghur, English, and Chinese. This could produce thousands or tens of thousands of video results, never mind the commentary. Since one cannot review them all, how does one chose the videos to review and why?

Each filtering format in YouTube has its advantages, each allowing for different kinds of research. For instance, if one wanted to understand the kind of videos posted around the events of the summer of 2009 (this really could be applied to any topic), one could filter by date of video posting. Of course, the researcher would have to accept that this would preclude commenting that also happened in the summer of 2009, but which

occurred on videos posted *prior* to that time. One could try to understand what types of videos were the most relevant to a particular topic by filtering based on “view count” (or access count as I would have it). This, however, would also preclude “low access density” videos that have their own data returns as the author has attempted to demonstrate.

This line of thinking could continue, but suffice it to say that the ease with which data can be filtered allows researchers to quickly determine what data out of voluminous quantities will be most relevant to their research question, but there is always a cost. One can never quite filter the data in such a way that allows them to only get what they need and exclude the rest. Filtering, while allowing a researcher to manage large quantities of data, will invariably filter out some of the Internet content a researcher needs for a project.

These lessons are also applicable to the Internet. The World Wide Web really is a web. It is large, unwieldy and provides almost too much information. Any rational research will require intelligent and deliberate filtering of one kind or another.

Quantitative analysis can be difficult to accomplish using YouTube as a source precisely because the “respondents” are not all being asked a preformulated set of questions. When the respondents ask all of the questions, which can differ from video to video, the “survey” results become unstructured and messy. While traditional surveys or interviews can produce meaningful statistics, it becomes extremely difficult to do so with YouTube because the respondents pick which questions to ask and which questions to answer.

The author has attempted to deal with this problem in two ways. First, the author attempted to chronicle the frequency at which certain issues appeared among the video set rather than within the videos individually. This allowed for the author to come to

some sense as to how often an issue was raised and identified as important to the respondents. Secondly, the author quantified the number of times key words, which were grouped by issue, appeared in the body of the commentary as a whole. This provided a means by which the author could ascertain which were the most salient issues or ideas as determined by the respondents. One word of caution: while the author attempted to quantify the numbers while allowing for misspellings, he undoubtedly missed some of the more egregious spelling errors. Doubtless, methodology, or technology, will improve over time and identify better ways to quantify the data.

More differences between traditional surveys or interview sets and an unstructured Internet source are identified here. Traditional means allow for better, more meaningful quantitative analysis than did YouTube, though with YouTube, some limited analysis can be accomplished. On the other hand, YouTube was not limited by the rigidity of questioning that makes meaningful quantitative analysis possible. The line of questioning was not limited to the researcher's understanding of the problems, biases, or research needs. It was only limited by the understanding of the "respondents" themselves. Another weakness of YouTube, and of the Internet at large, became a strength. The very reason quantitative analysis on the Internet is so difficult is precisely the reason that makes Internet source material so authentic. Researchers can leverage the authenticity of the Internet to hone their own work. Commentaries found on YouTube, for example, can point scholars to new lines of research, and help them ask different kinds of questions in interviews or surveys than have been asked before, this time with the benefit of meaningful quantitative analysis.

Language was another issue with which this project struggled. The Internet now provides a place where source material on specific issues is available in many different languages as social problems truly become global discourses. Among the sixty-two videos, the author found commentary in simplified and traditional Chinese, English, Thai, Arabic script, and presumably Uyghur. The videos were also in multiple languages, though almost entirely, as the search term would suggest, in Chinese. The language capabilities of the researcher allowed him to process the Chinese, Thai, and English, but not Arabic script or Uyghur. A cursory check of results using the English equivalent of the search term showed that a comprehension in Spanish would also be necessary.

If this project were to be expanded in a way that would be able to provide more comprehensive and meaningful results, it would by nature need to be a collaborative effort as it is highly unlikely that one researcher would be competent in all the languages that would appear in the source material. For the same reasons that the Internet is connecting people from many different backgrounds as they discuss social issues, the global nature of the discourse may force researchers into collaborative ventures as the only way to adequately deal with the source material.

In some ways, the Internet is providing unique ways for eye witnesses to tell their stories. Recall the video footage of Han-Uyghur violence caught on the video recorder, transmitted outside of China and uploaded onto YouTube. That may have been the eyewitness' only way to tell their story. Other such stories must also be on YouTube, waiting to be found and told. Researchers will find themselves having to follow their sources online, though this is not to say that traditional source material will become obsolete.

The ground is shifting under the feet of those seeking to understand contemporary social issues of any nature. New types of sources are now available online, and they are occurring in many different languages in volumes that are staggering. The more networked the world becomes, the more digitized the source material will be.

To some degree, the digitization of source material makes it perishable. Should YouTube or other Internet sites go bankrupt, or suffer an electronic attack that compromises the content in its servers, the source material simply goes away. These videos are not hardcopy books, ledgers, or chests of microfiche that can be content to collect dust in a library until found and used. While the Internet is likely to be a persistent force in the world for decades to come, there is no guarantee that any particular website or web service will survive technological or social change. YouTube, like other internet sources, should be actively exploited while they are still among us.

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